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## HOLY WAR BY OTHER MEANS

*Jake Mezey, Yale University*

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The medieval crusades in the Middle East are often regarded in popular culture, and by some historians, as a period of purely violent and fanatical conflict. The Catholic Church preached holy wars from the 11th to 14th century, resulting in the slaughter of thousands of Muslims, Jews, and Christians in modern day Palestine, Eastern Europe, and throughout the Mediterranean world. The Seljuks, Ayyubids, and Mameluks led similarly devastating wars to repulse the crusades and conquer the Latin kingdoms established in Palestine. In these wars, these groups invoked jihad, the concept of religious struggle. In reality, however, the political and cultural interactions between European “Franks” and local Muslims were far more nuanced. Franks and Muslims lived in the same cities, traded with each other in the same markets, and occasionally married each other. The architecture and art of the medieval Middle East reflects a highly cosmopolitan array of influences, including those of Western Europe in many surviving castles and churches. Muslim historian Usama ibn Munqidh frequently condemned the crusaders he fought against, while also noting the friends and allies he made among the Franks.<sup>1</sup> Among other kinds of nonviolent cultural exchange, diplomatic negotiation and alliances between Frankish and Muslim rulers were a vital aspect of the political landscape of the holy land during the crusades.

The diplomatic relations between Franks and Muslims during the Crusades raise questions about how the Crusaders understood the concept of holy war. If we believe that crusaders single-mindedly viewed the holy land as belonging to Christianity

and the Muslims living there as evil heathens, then how can we explain the alliance of Tancred of Antioch with Ridwan of Aleppo against the combined forces of Baldwin II and Jawali Saqwa?<sup>22</sup> Traditional scholarship on the Crusades has often shied away from examining the prevalence of political cooperation across cultural lines and its implications for crusader motivations. One camp, however, has emerged, which takes the politically expedient treaties signed between Muslim and Frankish rulers as evidence that purely material rather than religious motivations were central to the crusades. While this interpretation could explain many alliances and treaties between Christian and Muslims individually, it ignores the context that generated the crusading movement in the first place, and more importantly the centrality of religious objectives in many of the political negotiations of crusaders. That being said, holy war ideology was not so rigid as to prevent multiple alliances between crusader and Muslim rulers or peace treaties that compromised on control of religious sites or allowed for the religious freedom of the local population. This paper will examine the sources and limits of political negotiation between crusaders and Muslim rulers by focusing on three representative examples of diplomacy during several periods. First, the relationship between the rulers of Antioch and Aleppo after the First Crusade highlights the integration of the crusader states into the existing Syrian political landscape. Second, the peace negotiations between Richard I and Saladin illustrate how military necessity shaped negotiations during the Third Crusade. Finally, Frederick II's successful negotiations with Al-Kamil and the peaceful transfer of Jerusalem to Christian control in 1229 serves as the most striking examples of cooperation in the face of ideological conflict between a European and Muslim ruler during the crusades. I propose an understanding of the crusades as a process of balancing political interests within a religious framework and reconciling reality with ideology.

The only book entirely dedicated to the history of diplomacy during the crusades is Michael Köhler's work *Alliances*

*and Treaties between Frankish and Muslim Rulers in the Middle East: Cross-cultural Diplomacy in the Period of the Crusades.* As a result, this paper is heavily influenced by that book's arguments but differs on several key points. Köhler argues that the crusader states were quickly incorporated as another facet into the natural political structure that already existed in the Levant. This argument I fully support, but Köhler goes on to use the wealth of realist negotiations as evidence against religious motivations on the part of the Europeans. Köhler's book points out the purely material interests of Frankish rulers who he suggests were mostly trying to seize land and political power. I argue that spiritual motivations were in fact central to the crusades and that cross-cultural political negotiation also reflected an internal negotiation between conflicting ideals and realities. Crusaders believed in a clear delineation between Christian and heathen and in a divine mandate to conquer the holy land, but once they reached Palestine, political realities had to be incorporated into their conception of what it meant to take the cross.

Yvonne Friedman has written two insightful articles on the role of alliances and treaties within a religious context. The first article deals with acceptable and unacceptable alliances between Franks and Muslims and the second on the negotiation of peace treaties. I draw heavily on two of her main theories. First, alliances between Muslims and Christians were viewed as treasonous in some cases, but in other cases they were successfully reconciled with religious ideology.<sup>3</sup> Second, peaceful exchange between Muslims and Christians had to be explicitly explained and justified within the crusader ethos, while warfare did not.<sup>4</sup> This paper seeks to build on Friedman's work and examine the process by which crusaders reconciled their religious ideology with diplomacy.

Thomas Asbridge's 2013 article in the *Journal of Medieval Studies* explores the role of negotiation between Richard I and Saladin. Asbridge shows that diplomacy during the Third Crusade often served to garner military advantages or to gain a

stronger negotiating position. He goes on to argue that Richard I showed far more diplomatic subtlety and skill than previous scholars had recognized.<sup>5</sup> Asbridge's article, along with Yvonne Friedman's previously mentioned works, are the foundation of the argument put forward in this paper that diplomatic measures served as an extension of holy war on another front during the Third Crusade.

Hiroshi Takayama's article on the reasons behind Frederick II's choice to negotiate rather than fight with Al-Kamil has been incredibly important to the understanding of the Sixth Crusade. Takayama places Frederick's expedition within the context of his long-standing diplomatic relationship and friendship with Al-Kamil, which preceded his actual journey to the Middle East in 1229.<sup>6</sup> Takayama identifies several key factors that influenced Frederick's decision to pursue a diplomatic approach to crusading, particularly Frederick's cosmopolitan upbringing in Sicily. In this paper, I identify Frederick II as the crusader leader who was able to reconcile diplomacy and religion to the greatest degree, and I draw on Takayama's analysis to explain the personal factors that allowed him to negotiate successfully across cultures. Furthermore, I build on Takayama's argument that Frederick's motivations were religious rather than simple political opportunism.

The lack of original treaties poses a major challenge to the study of diplomacy between Franks and Muslims during the crusades. Most of the agreements between rulers may never have been widely copied, were mostly conducted through spoken negotiation, and were "signed" only with verbal swearing of oaths. Therefore, the majority of primary sources available are Latin and Arabic historians who provide an account of negotiations conducted many years in the past, for which they were often not present. Despite this challenge, we can still study the reaction, memory, and political effects of cross-cultural diplomacy during the crusades. In many ways, the subjective accounts of medieval historians are key to understanding the struggles faced in

portraying the religious nature of warfare alongside the limited and material compromises that each side made with their supposed enemies.

After the successes of the First Crusade (1096-1099), its leaders established the “Outremer,” a series of Latin kingdoms on the Mediterranean coast. These kingdoms existed, in one form or another, from 1099 until the city of Acre fell in 1291, ending major crusading in Palestine. For nearly 200 years, however, these crusader states and their rulers had to navigate the complex network of alliances and rivals that formed the local political landscape. Even as these states retained the religious ideology that they had been founded upon, they also actively allied with Muslim rulers and engaged in war against common enemies. The First Crusade owed its very success, in part, to the divided nature of the Seljuk Turkish principalities in the region and the ability of the crusaders to exploit these divisions.<sup>7</sup> Political conflicts after the First Crusade also included rivalries among the crusader states, especially as the Kingdom of Jerusalem attempted to assert its authority over the other states of the Outremer. The clash between a realpolitik approach to diplomacy and the religious crusader ethos was particularly apparent in the Principality of Antioch. After the fall of the County of Edessa, Antioch was the frontier of the Crusader States and was both a frequent enemy and sometimes ally of its Muslim neighbor Aleppo.

Bohemond of Taranto and his Italian Norman entourage became rulers of the city of Antioch after the Crusaders defeated the besieging forces of Kerbogah in 1098.<sup>8</sup> For the next 30 years, Bohemond, and his nephew Tancred, expanded and consolidated their control over the surrounding territory, capturing towns and playing off rivalries between Muslim rulers. The primary power relationship in North Western Syria became that of Antioch and Aleppo. The two cities, and under their respective rulers, vied for control over the collection of towns and castles between them while simultaneously attempting to maintain their independence from the influence of outside forces.

In 1098, Godfrey of Bouillon, who had occupied the town of Tell Bashir, was approached by Umar, the Muslim ruler of the town of Azaz. Umar had rebelled against Ridwan, the ruler of Aleppo, and needed help from the crusaders to repel Ridwan's punitive attack.<sup>9</sup> Albert of Aachen records that Umar initially approached Godfrey through a local Syrian Christian, but it was after Umar sent his son as a negotiator and hostage that Godfrey agreed to conclude an alliance and come to his aid.<sup>10</sup> Godfrey had to convince the other leaders of the crusade in Antioch, Bohemond of Taranto and Raymond of Toulouse, to assist him in his alliance with Umar. The two lords were hesitant to ally themselves with a Muslim, so Godfrey had to use religious imagery to prompt them to assist him, arguing that helping these Turks would please God.<sup>11</sup> Bohemond and Raymond likely were reluctant to leave Antioch as they were still vying for control of the city at the time and also may have been jealous of Godfrey's opportunity to establish a foothold in Northern Syria. Along with his religious urgings, Godfrey threatened to refuse aid to either of them in the future if they refused to participate now.<sup>12</sup> This combination eventually prompted the rival leaders to jointly defeat the forces of Ridwan besieging Azaz, leading Umar to conclude a treaty of alliance with Godfrey.

The defense of Azaz is the first example of a direct military alliance between Crusaders and Muslims and suggests a number of conclusions. First, even as early as 1098, the leaders of the First Crusade were willing to make an alliance with a Muslim ruler. Rather than simply concluding a peace treaty or extracting tribute, Godfrey, Bohemond, and Raymond, actively cooperated with Umar. Secondly, the Franks were nearly immediately drawn into the dynamics of local Syrian politics and rivalries. While the appearance of the Crusaders was met with force by the rulers whose principalities they threatened, their presence also provided opportunities for dissatisfied tributaries like Umar to find new allies to support their rebellions. Finally, personal gain or advantage and religious ideology do not seem to have

been mutually exclusive to the leaders of the First Crusade. argued that assistance to one group of Muslim Turks against another was included in their divine mandate to retake the holy land. At the same time, he made appeals to the other leaders' personal glory and threats about their future political alliances. Since Godfrey was unafraid to openly state political threats, his spiritual message was likely not pure propaganda. Considering the context of the initial calling of the First Crusade, it is hard to believe that the crusaders used religion as a simple dog-whistle. It is also undeniable that nearly all the leaders of the First Crusade were interested in personal gain and glory. The squabble between Bohemond and Raymond over Antioch, and Baldwin I's expedition to seize Edessa attests to the importance of territorial gain for the crusading elite.<sup>13</sup> We must conclude, therefore, that these were not necessarily contradictory motivations and the crusaders believed that conquering the Holy Land for Christianity also meant conquering it for themselves.



Map of the four Crusader states after the First Crusade

The peace signed by Bohemond and Ridwan of Aleppo in 1103 offers another example of the presence of religion in treaty-



making between crusaders and Muslims after the First Crusade. Alarmed at the expansion of Antioch's power, Ridwan negotiated a truce by paying Bohemond 7,000 dinars and ten horses in exchange for the release of Muslim prisoners.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, Ibn Shaddad reported that the treaty also required that a cross be mounted on a minaret of the citadel's mosque.<sup>15</sup> Supposedly, the cross was later moved with the permission of the crusaders to a local church in Aleppo, where it was recorded as late as 1124.<sup>16</sup> While this detail of the treaty between Bohemond and Ridwan remains unverified by other sources, it provides an example of religious negotiation intertwined with political negotiation. Being momentarily in the stronger position, Bohemond forced a Christian symbol on Aleppo as a sign of the crusaders' claim to the region. The fact that the cross was the symbolic priority for Bohemond, rather than a coat of arms, is evidence he conceived his own conquests as an extension of holy war. If, however, he really did allow the cross to be moved from the mosque to a church, it shows a remarkable adaptability of ideology to the necessities of peacemaking. If Bohemond was worried that he may have overreached and endangered the truce by forcing the cross into such a public and symbolically important position, it makes sense that he might quietly have agreed to move it to save the treaty. It is worth noting that most sources only record the monetary payment in exchange for prisoners. It would not be surprising, however, if the negotiations around the placement of the cross in the city were kept somewhat discrete in the written record, since the presence and removal of the cross would be embarrassing to both sides. Even though this truce was signed in 1103, it would not be until after the battle of Harran in 1104 that a more lasting agreement was negotiated and active cooperation began between Antioch and Aleppo.

During the Battle of Harran, Baldwin II Count of Edessa was captured and fell into the hands of Jawali Saqwa of Mosul.<sup>17</sup> Bohemond preceded to attempt a crusade against the Byzantine Empire, leaving his nephew Tancred as regent of Antioch. Tancred

was also selected as regent of Edessa. As such, Tancred had little desire to help secure Baldwin's freedom, preferring instead to try and consolidate his hold on the two principalities.<sup>18</sup> Baldwin was ransomed the latter wanted to take control of Aleppo.<sup>19</sup> According to different sources, Tancred either refused to return control of Edessa to Baldwin II, returned the city but tried to hold onto some of the surrounding land, or would only return the county in exchange for an oath of vassalage from Baldwin.<sup>20</sup> Regardless, this dispute triggered a conflict between Tancred and Baldwin at the same time that Jawali threatened Aleppo. Despite the fact that arbitration in 1108 by the patriarch of Antioch restored Edessa to him, subsequently assisted Jawali in an attack against Ridwan of Aleppo due to the oath he had sworn on release.<sup>21</sup> Ridwan convinced Tancred to take his side against Jawali and Baldwin by arguing that if Jawali captured Aleppo, Antioch would be next. The result was an alliance of Tancred of Antioch with Ridwan of Aleppo against Baldwin of Edessa and Jawali of Mosul in 1109. The two sides met in battle somewhere near Tell Bashir, and Tancred and Ridwan were victorious.<sup>22</sup> Later that year at a council of crusader leaders, Tancred and Baldwin were reconciled, but their rivalry persisted until Tancred's death in 1112.

This episode, which is corroborated by multiple Arabic and Latin sources, reveals the full extent of cross-cultural alliances immediately after the First Crusade and the factors that shaped them. Not only did both Baldwin and Tancred form military alliances with Muslim rulers who they had previously fought, but when their personal rivalry coincided with conflict between their allies, they actively fought on opposite sides of the battlefield. In fact, Baldwin is reported to have executed a Christian convert in Saruj who had offended his allies under Jawali.<sup>23</sup> Hillenbrand and Köhler note how individual political maneuvering superseded religious differences in the period after the First Crusade, and local Turkish rulers were more likely to use the crusader states to shore up their own principalities than to try and destroy

them outright.<sup>24</sup> Ibn Abi Tayyi records Ridwan as saying that if Jawali takes Aleppo, “there remains for the Franks, together with himself [Ridwan], no longer a place in Syria.” Köhler emphasizes this idea of “no place” as the key to the formations of nearly all subsequent alliances between neighboring crusader and Muslim states.<sup>25</sup> The rise of an outside eastern power, often originating from Mosul, would prompt the warring states of Syria to join together to preserve their independence. This pattern would be repeated throughout the 12th century, exemplified by the alliance between the crusader states, specifically the Kingdom of Jerusalem, with Damascus against the threat of Zengi in 1137.<sup>26</sup> Köhler argues that the crusaders were fully integrated into the political landscape of Syria and behaved according to the same dynamics that had persisted in the area before their arrival. It is, however, important to examine details that might complicate the portrayal of the crusader states as indistinguishable from previous polities and unaffected by religious conflict.

Fulcher of Chartres claims that Tancred won with the “help of God.”<sup>27</sup> Matthew of Edessa notes Tancred pious character, and goes on to say that Baldwin’s actions were wicked in the eyes of God, most likely for his alliance with Jawali.<sup>28</sup> Despite the fact that Tancred illegally withheld Edessa from Baldwin, he was praised by contemporary sources while Baldwin was condemned. Asbridge suggests that since Baldwin was the first to associate with a Turkish ally, he was blamed in the sources, and Tancred was seen as simply responding with a tit-for-tat.<sup>29</sup> It is possible that the use of a Muslim ally to forcibly resolve a dispute with another Christian was damnable while enlisting help from the same kind of ally in self-defense was acceptable. The fact that Fulcher of Chartres claimed that God was on Tancred’s side, and Mathew attested to his piety, means that an alliance with Muslims was not by definition sinful. Some amount of internal negotiation was certainly necessary, however, to make religious ideology fit with political reality. could only justify their alliances with the opposite side by deeming them absolutely necessary.<sup>30</sup> Language

explaining the need to avoid further bloodshed, secure vital trade routes, or protect Christians in a region always preambled contemporary descriptions of treaties concluded between Muslims and crusaders.<sup>31</sup> The crusaders clearly viewed war as the default and thought that peace and alliances were possible but had to be justified within the context of their religious struggle. Holy war was flexible, but only if one had a good enough excuse. Perhaps Baldwin's alliance failed to meet the test of sufficient necessity to be justified religiously, leading Matthew of Edessa to condemn him. On the other hand, Tancred's alliance of mutual strategic self defense with Ridwan was acceptable enough to be divinely sanctioned.

The example of diplomatic relations between Antioch and Aleppo sheds light on the way Frankish and Muslim leaders interacted diplomatically after the First Crusade. The politically divided nature of Syria at the time of the Crusader's arrival was key to their surprising success, and the nature of politics after the individual Frankish lords carved out territories for themselves. These territories were built on peace treaties concluded with defeated local rulers, which began the process of integrating the crusader states into the existing framework of medieval Syria and Palestine. Individual Muslim rulers also took the presence of new powerful actors as an opportunity to improve their fortunes and find potential allies. Similarly, desire for personal gain led to conflicts and rivalries between the Frankish leaders. Together, these factors led to instances of conflicting Frankish-Muslim alliances. Despite these trends, religion and holy war ideology were still central to the political motivations of crusaders. Personal gain did not exclude piety for the leaders of the First Crusade and their contemporaries. Similarly, alliances with Muslims could be accommodated within the crusading ethos as long as they were properly justified.

The uneasy equilibrium established in medieval Palestine was punctuated both by the periodic arrivals of new Europeans in subsequent numbered Crusades as well as the rise of dominant

Muslim powers with the ability to overturn the status quo. In the case of the Third Crusade (1188-1192) both factors were true. The consolidation of Syria and Egypt under Nur-al Din and Saladin led to the decisive defeat and capture of Jerusalem after the battle of Hattin in 1187. The threat to the Outremer and the loss of Jerusalem triggered the calling of the Third Crusade and the arrival of a large force primarily under the command of Richard I of England in 1191.<sup>32</sup> The next year of warfare between Saladin and Richard proved bloody and militarily exhausting for both sides. Richard I and Saladin each repeatedly used diplomatic negotiations and overtures of peace as tools to attempt to gain an advantage over each other.

In 1191, Richard forced the capitulation of the city of Acre and Saladin engaged in lengthy negotiations over the surrender of the garrison using the supposed True Cross as a bargaining chip.<sup>33</sup> Saladin may have been attempting to delay the crusaders' march on Jerusalem and give him time to ready the city's defenses. According to the *Itinerarium Peregrinorum et Gesta Regis Ricardi*, Richard eventually suspected Saladin's tactics and decided to execute the Muslim prisoners he had taken en masse.<sup>34</sup> This exchange highlights how Saladin used negotiations to gain a potential military advantage. Concluding a treaty with the enemy while looking to gain a future advantage corresponds with the acceptable role of negotiation under jihad or holy war.<sup>35</sup> Since Richard was in a position of strength, he felt no compulsion to spend time compromising with Saladin and instead chose to send a message as to how he would respond to future ploys.

Asbridge notes how Richard was capable of using similar negotiating tactics to gain an edge on his opponent. In September, Richard led his army south from Acre, and his route took him through the forest of Arsuf.<sup>36</sup> Fearing an ambush by Saladin's forces in the forest, Richard sent messengers to make contact and to negotiate a peace. Saladin agreed to the talks and sent his brother al-Adil as a negotiator. Saladin was waiting for a group of reinforcements to arrive, and therefore instructed his brother

to lengthen the negotiations as much as possible. When al-Adil and Richard met, however, the latter immediately demanded a full surrender of Saladin's troops. Saladin's brother rejected these terms, after which Richard immediately drew up his army into battle order and marched through the forest. Asbridge astutely concludes that calling the talks and immediately torpedoing them was a deliberate tactic on Richard's part to catch Saladin unaware.<sup>37</sup> Ibn Shaddad records that Saladin's army was in no position to respond to this move and retreated in substantial disorder.<sup>38</sup>

Both examples show how diplomatic negotiation served to further each side's military position. Richard and Saladin played a delicate game of offering terms in weaker positions, not meant to be accepted, but to manipulate the other party into giving up an advantage. Later, Conrad of Montferrat, one of Richard's subordinates, treacherously attempted to negotiate an alliance with Saladin. His plot never had much hope of being successful, but it put Richard in a far weaker position, as Saladin used it to try to force greater concessions from the English king. Richard responded by offering a marriage alliance between his sister Joan and Saladin's brother al-Adil to jointly rule Jerusalem. This marriage would have run counter to both secular custom and religious law, but the offer diverted Saladin from conspiring with Conrad.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, Richard may have intended to sow distrust in the Ayyubid camp by offering the marriage to al-Adil, with whom he had developed a publicly friendly relationship, rather than al-Afdal, who was Saladin's son and heir.<sup>40</sup>

During the Third Crusade, diplomacy was not opposed to the concept of holy war and jihad, but was simply another tool by which to wage it. The evidence of Richard's and Saladin's interactions throughout the conflict suggest no delineation of military and diplomatic measures into separate spheres. Debating the terms of an agreement could give crucial time for military forces to move into position. An opponent's willingness to agree to negotiate might give valuable information about their

strength.<sup>41</sup> Crusade and jihad were waged both on the battlefield and at the negotiating table. Politics did not necessarily serve as a sign of compromise on ideological grounds but functioned instead as a continuation of holy war by other means.

The fact that neither Saladin nor Richard were able to gain a decisive edge over each other made a diplomatic settlement between the two sides necessary. Ibn Shaddad recorded an early exchange between Richard and Saladin. Richard sent a message that claimed, "Jerusalem is the center of our worship which we will never renounce even if there were only one of us left." Saladin replied by writing, "Let not the king imagine that we shall give it up, for we are unable to breathe a word of that amongst the Muslims."<sup>42</sup> Having begun the Third Crusade with the grand goal of recapturing Jerusalem for Christianity and restoring the territory of the crusader states, Richard was forced to accept the reality of negotiating for only minor gains. Similarly, Saladin was the most prominent proponent of jihad during the 12th century.<sup>43</sup> Although he successfully captured Jerusalem, he was unable to fully expel the Frankish presence from the holy land. The inherently limited scope of a compromise acceptable to both sides represents a direct clash between reality and the directives of holy war.

How could these two leaders at ideological loggerheads and a military impasse negotiate a treaty? The highly temporary treaty they signed was perhaps the only solution. The terms of the agreement included the demolition of the fortifications of Ascalon, access to the Holy Sepulcher for Christian Pilgrims, and a coastal area of land between Tyre and Jaffa being granted to the crusader states, but the official language of the agreement was only a three-year truce.<sup>44</sup> Neither leader could justify to their followers, or perhaps even to themselves, any kind of peace treaty meant to last eternally.<sup>45</sup> A lasting agreement, however, was plainly a necessity for both parties. Richard I suffered from the combination of a demoralized army, lack of resources, political turmoil in England, and personal illness.<sup>46</sup> However, he still

claimed that the reason for the three-year period for the truce was to give him one year to travel back to England, one year to organize fresh troops, and one year to return.<sup>47</sup> Similarly, Ibn Shaddad claims that Saladin agreed to the truce in order to give his soldiers time to rest and strengthen the defenses of the city of Jerusalem.<sup>48</sup> Neither of these things happened, however, as Richard was captured and held for ransom in Austria, and Saladin died in 1193. Instead, this three-year truce became the foundation of the last Latin kingdom in the holy land, which would persist for another century until the fall of Acre in 1291. Yvonne Friedman used the term “small peace” to accurately describe the kind of settlement produced by reconciling religious ideology with political reality.<sup>49</sup> Only minor armistices were possible under the framework of holy war or jihad, mere breaks while each side marshalled its forces. It was, however, often the case that leaders repeatedly renewed and expanded these minor agreements to form a patchwork, uneasy, but often long-lasting peace. In this way, coexistence was possible even within the hostile and incompatible religious conflict of the Third Crusade.



The remaining Crusader states during the Third Crusade



Finally, what is often referred to as the Sixth Crusade was an utterly exceptional case of diplomacy, as the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II and the Ayyubid Sultan of Egypt Al-Kamil nonviolently negotiated the exchange of Jerusalem. Before his journey to the holy land, Frederick II had been excommunicated by Pope Honorius the III for remaining in Europe and delaying his promise to go on crusade. Moreover, the Pope blamed Frederick for the failure of the Fifth Crusade in Egypt. However, in 1229, Fredrick sailed with his army to Acre where he negotiated the Treaty of Jaffa and Tel-Ajul with the ruler of Egypt, Al-Kamil. The treaty gave control of Jerusalem to Frederick and instituted a ten-year truce between Franks and Muslims in the Holy Land. In return, Frederick guaranteed free access and protection for Muslim pilgrims and support for Al-Kamil against his rivals in Syria. Frederick's ability to seize a diplomatic opportunity to retake Jerusalem without the use of force is unique in the history of the crusades, and it seems he saw no contradiction between the religious mandate of crusading and the use of negotiation to obtain his strategic goal without bloodshed. It could simply be that Frederick was lucky and that he happened to act under favorable political circumstances. While this is true, it does not explain how Frederick managed to bring himself to make an agreement that was nearly universally reviled by other Christians. I argue against one common position that Frederick negotiated with al-Kamil for non-religious reasons and merely out of political opportunism. I suggest instead that Frederick's ability to reconcile his religious ideology with political and cultural cooperation allowed him to succeed in regaining control of Jerusalem in a way no other European figure in the period was able to.

Though perhaps partially motivated by self-interest, Frederick II's decision to retake the city of Jerusalem was primarily motivated by religious conviction. Frederick II makes his piety abundantly clear in his letter to Henry III of England, writing:

at length Jesus Christ, Son of God, beholding from on high our devoted endurance and patient devotion to his cause, in his merciful compassion of us at length brought it about that the Sultan of Babylon [al-Kamil] restored to us the holy city, the place where the feet of Christ trod, and where the true worshippers adore the Father in spirit and in truth.<sup>50</sup>

Frederick may simply have been trying to win sympathy or praise from Henry and any other readers by portraying a religious exterior. That being said, however, Frederick's repeated religious fervor in his letters indicates something more about his motivations, especially if other explanations fail to describe his actions. One common explanation of Frederick's decision to go to the holy land was his marriage to Isabella of Brienne, who carried the title Queen of Jerusalem in 1225.<sup>51</sup> This marriage technically made Frederick King of Jerusalem, which has led scholars to argue that claiming this particular crown led Frederick to go on crusade. However, after negotiating with al-Kamil and crowning himself, Frederick left the city, never to return. Furthermore, Frederick made no serious attempt to personally govern the city or extract revenue from it.<sup>52</sup> Installing himself as King of Jerusalem, was clearly not Frederick's primary motivation. Another explanation is that Frederick hoped to improve his reputation with the Pope or as a Christian in general by retaking Jerusalem. It is clear, however, that his actions only made Frederick more unpopular with the general body of Christians, who supposedly pelted him with offal when he departed from Acre.<sup>53</sup> Frederick's negotiations also clearly did little to appease the Pope, who proceeded to call a crusade against him in 1248.<sup>54</sup> This evidence together precludes the third argument that retaking Jerusalem made Frederick more powerful. Incurring the enmity of the vast majority of European Christians as well as having to fight off papal forces most likely caused more trouble for Frederick than if he had not gone on crusade at all. Based on this evidence, it is reasonable to conclude

that Frederick's primary motivation for retaking Jerusalem was his religious conviction.

If Frederick's motivations were religious, how was he so comfortable negotiating with and making concessions to al-Kamil, a Muslim ruler? Frederick's upbringing as a youth on the island of Sicily was key to his early understanding of Islam and has been commented on by multiple sources.<sup>55</sup> Growing up in an area and court life that certainly included Muslims, Frederick had to learn how to interact with members of another religion on a daily basis, even as he himself was expected to behave as a devout Christian. While nearly all previous Crusaders had little to no experience with the Islamic world, Frederick's comfort in communicating across cultural lines was likely a key factor in the success of his relations with al-Kamil. Hiroshi Takayama analyzes the longstanding relationship between al-Kamil and Frederick that both preceded and outlasted the events of the Sixth Crusade. Seventeenth century accounts of inscriptions on the walls of the Cathedral of Cefalu suggest that Frederick might have sent envoys to al-Kamil as early as 1217.<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, Frederick maintained such good relations with the Sultan that they frequently exchanged correspondence and even poetry after he had returned to Europe.<sup>57</sup> This friendship may have been a crucial factor in the peaceful conclusion of the treaty of Jaffa and Tel-Ajul. The main reason al-Kamil offered Jerusalem to Frederick was to gain the Emperor's support against Kamil's brother al-Muzzam.<sup>58</sup> However, al-Muzzam died before Frederick's arrival at Acre.<sup>59</sup> Despite the disappearance of his main rival, al-Kamil still chose to conclude the treaty with Frederick. This decision runs explicitly counter to the established dynamic under which agreements between Frank and Muslim had to be justified by necessity. Thus, the success of the sixth Crusade was exceptional in that a Christian and Muslim ruler were able to reach an agreement purely diplomatically, which shocked the sensibilities of their coreligionists. The foundation of this agreement was the personal relationship built up over time between Frederick II and

al-Kamil.



Painting of Frederick II (center left) meeting with Sultan Al-Kamil (center right)

This paper has sought to highlight several trends in diplomatic negotiations between Christian and Muslim rulers during the Crusades. First, conducting diplomacy for personal gain was not seen as necessarily contradictory to the ideology of holy war. Crusaders and their Muslim counterparts incorporated the negotiation of treaties into their religious framework as the necessity arose. Diplomacy also served as both an extension of war and as the foundation of numerous small peace agreements that made coexistence in medieval Palestine and Syria possible. A crucial aspect of understanding the crusades historically is the examination of the balancing and reconciliation between abstract and unlimited religious ideology and the limited and complex political realities of war and peace.

# Holy War by Other Means

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Carole Hillenbrand, *The Crusades: Islamic Perspectives* (Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1999), 259.
- <sup>2</sup> Michael Köhler, *Alliances and Treaties between Frankish and Muslim Rulers in the Middle East: Cross-cultural Diplomacy in the Period of the Crusades*, ed. Konrad Hirschler, trans. Peter M. Holt (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 66.
- <sup>3</sup> Yvonne Friedman, "Chapter 6: Peacemaking in an Age of War: When Were Cross-Religious Alliances in the Latin East Considered Treason?" in *In the Crusader World*, ed. Adrian J. Boas, (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016), 98-104.
- <sup>4</sup> Yvonne Friedman, "How to End Holy War: Negotiations and Peace Treaties between Muslims and Crusaders in the Latin East," *Common Knowledge* 21, no. 1 (January 2015): 83–103.
- <sup>5</sup> Thomas Asbridge, "Talking to the enemy: the role and purpose of negotiations between Saladin and Richard the Lionheart during the Third Crusade," *Journal of Medieval History* 39, no. 3 (September 2013): 275-296.
- <sup>6</sup> Hiroshi Takayama, "Frederick II's crusade: an example of Christian–Muslim diplomacy," *Mediterranean Historical Review* 25, no. 2 (2010): 169.
- <sup>7</sup> Christopher Tyerman, *The Crusades: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 23.
- <sup>8</sup> Thomas Asbridge, *The Creation of the Principality of Antioch, 1098-1130* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2000), 42.
- <sup>9</sup> Asbridge, *The Creation of the Principality of Antioch*, 31.
- <sup>10</sup> Köhler, 38.
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid, 39.
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>13</sup> Asbridge, *The Creation of the Principality of Antioch*, 34.
- <sup>14</sup> Ibid, 55.
- <sup>15</sup> Köhler, 64.
- <sup>16</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>17</sup> Malcolm Barber, *The Crusader States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 82.
- <sup>18</sup> Asbridge, *The Creation of the Principality of Antioch*, 111.
- <sup>19</sup> Ibid, 112.
- <sup>20</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>21</sup> Köhler, 66.
- <sup>22</sup> Asbridge, *The Creation of the Principality of Antioch*, 113
- <sup>23</sup> Köhler, 70.
- <sup>24</sup> Hillenbrand, 82.
- <sup>25</sup> Köhler, 66.

- <sup>26</sup> Barber, 164.
- <sup>27</sup> Ibid, 84.
- <sup>28</sup> Asbridge, *The Creation of the Principality of Antioch*, 114.
- <sup>29</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>30</sup> Friedman, "How to End Holy War," 83-103.
- <sup>31</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>32</sup> Tyerman, 32.
- <sup>33</sup> Asbridge, "Talking to the enemy," 275-296.
- <sup>34</sup> *Itinerarium Peregrinorum et Gesta Regis Ricardi*, IV, 2, 4, ed. William Stubbs (London: Longmans, 1864) in *The Crusades: A Documentary History*, trans. James Brundage (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1962), 183-84.
- <sup>35</sup> Friedman, "How to End Holy War," 83-103.
- <sup>36</sup> Asbridge, "Talking to the enemy," 275-296.
- <sup>37</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>38</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>39</sup> Köhler, 263.
- <sup>40</sup> Asbridge, "Talking to the enemy," 275-296.
- <sup>41</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>42</sup> Barber, 1.
- <sup>43</sup> Hillenbrand, 225.
- <sup>44</sup> *Itinerarium Peregrinorum et Gesta Regis Ricardi: Richard the Lionheart Makes Peace with Saladin*, 1192, ed. William Stubbs (London: Longmans, 1864).
- <sup>45</sup> Friedman, "How to End Holy War," 83-103.
- <sup>46</sup> Barber, 353.
- <sup>47</sup> Friedman, "How to End Holy War," 83-103.
- <sup>48</sup> Barber, 354.
- <sup>49</sup> Friedman, "How to End Holy War," 83-103.
- <sup>50</sup> "Frederick II to Henry (1229)" in *The Crusades, A Reader*, 2nd Edition, ed. S.J. Allen & Emilie Amt (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014).
- <sup>51</sup> Takayama, 169-185.
- <sup>52</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>53</sup> "Letter of Patriarch Gerold" in *The Crusades: A Reader, 2nd Edition*, ed S.J. Allen & Emilie Amt (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014).
- <sup>54</sup> "Innocent IV's Call for a Crusade (1248)," in *The Crusades: A Reader, 2nd Edition*, ed S.J. Allen & Emilie Amt (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014).
- <sup>55</sup> Hillenbrand, 338.
- <sup>56</sup> Takayama, 169-185.
- <sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Hillenbrand, 336.

<sup>59</sup> Takayama, 169-185.

### Images

Page 145: "Atlas of Palestine: A political map of the Near East in 1135 CE," accessed January 27, 2020 via Wikimedia Commons, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Atlas\\_of\\_Palestine#History\\_maps](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Atlas_of_Palestine#History_maps).

Page 153: "Map Crusader states 1190," accessed January 27, 2020 via Wikimedia Commons, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Map\\_Crusader\\_states\\_1190-he.svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Map_Crusader_states_1190-he.svg).

Page 157: "Friedrich II mit Sultan al-Kamil," accessed January 27, 2020 via Wikimedia Commons, [https://it.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Friedrich\\_II.\\_mit\\_Sultan\\_al-Kamil.jpg](https://it.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Friedrich_II._mit_Sultan_al-Kamil.jpg).